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24/7: SLEEPLESS SOLDIERS AND THE PSYCHOPATHY OF CIVILIZATION

BIOPOLITICS 24/7, BALLARD, CYBORG, FUNKTIONELLER PSYCHOPATH, INSOMNIA, JONATHAN CRARY, TECHNOLOGY

On first reading Johnathan Crary's new book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* I wondered if I'd shifted into some dark psychopathic journey into the heart of darkness where citizens have become machines, augmented cyborgs in a sleepless universe of absolute death where no one dies and everyone works endlessly. In this work we discover that the American Imperium through its Defense Department (DARPA) for the past five years has sponsored research into "sleeplessness techniques, including neurochemicals, gene therapy, and transcranial magnetic stimulation".¹ Why? "The near-term goal is the development of methods to allow a combatant to go for a minimum of seven days without sleep, and in the longer term perhaps at least double that time frame, while preserving high levels of mental and physical performance" (2). Yet, this is just one part of a larger program, a quest for soldiers whose physical capabilities will more closely approximate the functionalities of non-human apparatuses and networks. There are massive ongoing efforts by the scientific-military complex to develop forms of "augmented cognition" that will enhance many kinds of human-machine interaction.⁽³⁾

It's as if our military-industrial complex has already bought into the *Transhumanist Manifesto's* declared message: "Technological evolution is fast, efficient, accelerating and better by design. To ensure the best chances of survival, take control of our own destiny and to be free, we must master evolution." I don't make this stuff up, sometimes I wish I had for it is so wild and unbelievable as to where it is taking us that I sometimes wonder if I live in the same universe of thought as these other humans. But – and this is key, are these others *human* in the old sense of that term? What are we becoming? We bandy about such terms as *posthuman(ism)* etc. with philosophical delight, as if we could play with these ideas in exclusive realms of philosophical discourse outside the actual world of pragmatic realities. But this is no longer the case. We live in a movie set, where the cyborgs and robots have become real, mutants are just another term for genetically engineered humans run amok, and our leaders put on smiling faces but are underneath reptilian predators on the road to oblivion. I joke about it in hyperbolic fashion, but the truth is that one begins to wonder if conspiracy theory is the order of the day rather than philosophy when it comes to what is going on in our military-industrial complex.

The American establishment seems at the moment to be working outside any legal or ethical system of values: *as if* the video games they've sponsored were suddenly coming alive as a real possibility. The whole notion of intervention into a voluntary

soldiers physical system to produce such strange behaviors as sleeplessness for the efforts of unimagined missions seems ludicrous at best. But what strikes me that we have finally entered the psychopathic realms of madness is this quest for soldiers whose physical capabilities will more closely approximate the functionalities of non-human apparatuses and networks.(3) Here we have billions of dollars being poured into defense programs to produce living cyborgs who have finally become inhuman machines devoid of what was once a young man or woman. This metamorphosis at the hands of our government and corporate fascist state seems a final blow against all that we've called human in the past.

Yet, we as philosophical thinkers may have helped in this state of affairs, we may be guilty of giving these monstrous authorities the very mental tools to allow them to remake humanity in their own image as if they were mortal gods in control of a new technological imperative. For years philosophers have been seeking to go beyond the old philosophical foundations of *humanistic* thought and civilization. In the process of doing this we've been responsible for giving those with a more literal minded sense of power and knowledge the very tools to enforce new forms of command and control. Are we, as philosophers, guilty of creating a posthuman civilization? The answer is simple: yes, we are the guilty ones who through our own discourses have slowly given birth to the technological monstrosity we most feared.

J. Robert Oppenheimer on July 16, 1945, in the Trinity test in New Mexico remarked that seeing the atomic bomb mushrooming across the landscape brought to mind words from the Bhagavad Gita: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." I think he realized just what he and other scientists had brought into the world. But did that stop them? No. Scientists love to compartmentalize their efforts, to remain anonymous and particularized concerning their scope and efforts, to absolve themselves of ethical responsibility as if science(s) were devoid of ethical impact in their eyes. They feel no responsibility for the actions of those who have tasked them with specific goals. They leave all ethical consideration to others and consider their work as purely formal and objective. At least that was the old way of looking at the sciences. For years now debates against that 1930's view of the sciences has been on the table, yet for the most part most working scientists even today remain within this impersonal template absolved of the crimes of their creations. If the scientists are not responsible for such things then who is? Of course I exaggerate, not all scientists are unethical, I speak of certain clichés that mark the profession rather than of specific individuals. There are ethics among the disciplines, yet I wonder at times how much impact the ethical writings have on the work-a-day efforts of most of the scientists themselves? I mean when you look at such governmental entities as DARPA and private entrepreneurs and corporate entities that invest heavily into these efforts most scientists keep their ethical thoughts to themselves while working on these projects. And, for many the efforts are so compartmentalized that the individual scientist may be working on just one aspect of the project and know nothing of the overall intention of the program as a whole. Knowledge is compartmentalized and segmented in these larger projects to the point that only those with specialized clearances ever know the goals of the intended program. That said one wonders just what the intended outcome of all these new convergence technologies is moving toward and who is drawing up the plans and initiatives?

The more I think about it the more I'm of the view that it is the philosophers themselves who have fallen into oblivion as far as the major thrust of our current civilization is concerned. Philosophers seem more like pets in a cultural playground spouting their theories, going to meetings, giving speeches, praising or blaming each other, but essentially powerless within the world of our ultra-modern late capitalist society to do much more than beg the question(s). I keep returning to Badiou and Žižek who seem to represent the face of an aspect of the Left. Badiou martialing with great precision an edifice of philosophy that to all apparent thinkers seems to have entered that pure abstract lair of mathematics to produce the perfect system. Yet, as many will tell us this system is flawed by the very mathematical theories that underpin its main arguments. Žižek on the other hand presents himself as the new Lacanian Hegel of our era, a clown without power, a philosopher of questions and more questions, a man who would speak on endlessly in entertaining speeches dialectically measuring the edge culture of our late capitalist society. Yet, as I've said before: we need answers not questions. Who will provide us with a common language for the common man and woman on the streets of our fragile earth. Philosophers seem to be dancing apes at the end of time rather than true revolutionaries offering us a way forward.

If I am wrong then tell me where is the philosopher today who knows a way out of this present quagmire of our inhuman civilization? Is the agenda being set by our Imperial Elite? Are we to become herd animals, cattle prodded and controlled by the biopower technologies of robotics, nanotech, biotech, and the ultimate cyborgization of a planned subhumanity of workers? Is this truly our future? The other night I watched the *Continuum* tv series up to season 3. Watching some of the footage we see a future where a Neocamerlist Society where humans are enslaved through neuroimplants and other invasive technologies to work within corporate hives as minions to elites. It's not as simple as that but that is the gist. In such a world even the experts, and the apparent security forces and people who are part of the upper tier can be controlled as well. From birth you are manufactured, stamped, and patterned to work for a particular corporate conclave. You are a patented commodity in a world wide system of capital. There is no escape unless you plan on rewiring history itself. And this is exactly what happens when a group of anarcho-socialist self-proclaimed freedom fighters known as "Liber8" escape execution by fleeing to the year 2012. I'll not go further than that.

But that is science fiction. We do not have that luxury to fictionalize what is truly happening around us in the sciences and the control regimes of our planetary civilization. As J.G. Ballard reminded us over and over: "We are all living in fictions at the moment, one need not write about it; instead the task of the writer, or any astute inquirer is to uncover what is left of reality." That brings us

back to DARPA's science fictional soldier of the future. As Crary tells us "the military is also funding many other areas of brain research, including the development of an anti-fear drug. There will be occasions when, for example, missile-armed drones cannot be used and death squads of sleep-resistant, fear-proofed commandos will be needed for missions of indefinite duration."⁽³⁾ One wonders what happens to such young men or women once the fighting is over and they are returned to their homelands? Will such invasive practices have lasting effects? Obviously. If we have such postmodern affective disorders as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), will the new disorder be post-traumatic sleep disorder? Sleepless in civilian life: the ultimate fugue syndrome. Time compression. Memory sickness. Insomnia.

Insomnia corresponds to the necessity of vigilance, to a refusal to overlook the horror and injustice that pervades the world. It is the disquiet of the effort to avoid inattention to the torment of the other. But its disquiet is also the frustrating inefficacy of an ethic of watchfulness; the act of witnessing and its monotony can become a mere enduring of the night, of the disaster. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Yet, we must not stop there. No. For what is good for soldiers is ultimately to be used on the rest of us:

As history has shown, war-related innovations are inevitably assimilated into a broader social sphere, and the sleepless soldier would be the forerunner of the sleepless worker or consumer. Non-sleep products, when aggressively promoted by pharmaceutical companies, would become first a lifestyle option, and eventually, for many, a necessity. ...^{24/ 7} markets and a global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption have been in place for some time, but now a human subject is in the making to coincide with these more intensively.⁽³⁾

Welcome to the neocameral global world vision where humans are machines in a sleepless universe of illuminated unending work. Maybe the parody corporation of ByoLogyc is the template for all future syntech dominators: "The modern world expects more from the people who claim to take care of them, and at ByoLogyc, we think they deserve it." And, although this is a parody, dreamed up by a Toronto art ensemble (Zed.To) to portray the dangers of this future world one can imagine that this is the future that will be portrayed to us down the pipe: beauty, health, happiness, immortality... the dream of perfectibility. ZED.TO was an 8-month narrative told in real-time through an integrated combination of interactive theatrical events and online content. It told the story of the beginning of the end of the world, from a viral pandemic created by ByoLogyc, a fictional Toronto-based biotech company. As one commentator reported: "ByoLogyc's CEO Chet Getram is a ruthless and manipulative fictional character — a living experiment designed to explore how the language of human-centred design, sustainable business, and social innovation could be used to obscure a nefarious and short-sighted vision of profit as generated by a new biological economy." ² Of course no one reads the fine print in the contract, not even our emerging social contracts:

The events that make up ZED.TO will follow an apocalypse-level event in Toronto, with *ByoLogyc* setting the stage. This takes the form of a launch party for the titular biotech company's new designer drug, populated by the corporate senior staff and a team of new interns (i.e., the audience). The interactive, mobile format is similar to a murder mystery, where the audience members must collect what information and office gossip they can between speeches and team-building exercises. The ZED.TO team prove themselves to be capable innovators in this intricate scenario, though sharing information with your fellow interns is crucial. The party's climax is only the beginning, setting things up for big events to come.

Meet Chet Getram, CEO of ByoLogyc and innovator on the frontier of lifestyle biotechnology products and services. Take in the ByoRetreat while your at it. And, a final message from Chet Getram:

After the recent devastating attack on ByoLogyc's production facilities by the online terrorist organization known as EXE, ByoLogyc is ready for action.

Escape the deadly BRX Virus that has mutated from our world-changing ByoRenew product. Purchase a ticket that guarantees you a place at our ByoRetreat facility in Toronto on November 2nd and 3rd, where you will be kept safe under the watchful eye of our Sanitation and Containment Division.

Such a parody corporation with its fictional introduction of a synthetic supervirus into the socio-cultural world of our non-history to bring about a State of Emergency to bring humanity under the umbrella of a new security bio-regime may be a parable of our neocameralist age, yet it portrays exactly the psychopathological imperatives that are driving the transhumanist vision toward human perfection and earthly paradise of immortality. As Cary suggests an illuminated 24/ 7 world without shadows is the final capitalist mirage of post-history, of an exorcism of the otherness that is the motor of historical change.⁽⁹⁾ In such a world sleep becomes the ultimate crime, it is thievery against the corporation and the state which demands the ultimate sacrifice of labor for the gift of immortality and happiness, security and health: sleeplessness forever.

to be continued...

1. Crary, Jonathan (2013-06-04). 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (pp. 1-2). Verso Books. Kindle Edition.

2. Trevor Haldenby April Fools: The Truth about ByoLogyc (Singularity)

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